

Overworked Americans or Overwhelmed Americans?

By Jeff Davidson

Americans' leisure time is being eroded by social forces beyond their control. Here is a thought-provoking look at why most people are caught in a frenzied, time-pressured existence despite their efforts to live and work at a comfortable pace.

Here is a multiple-choice quiz question:

Which word best describes the typical working American today?

- A) *Overworked*
- B) *Underworked*
- C) *Energetic*
- D) *Lazy*

Although much has been written about whether A, B, C, or D is correct, the most appropriate answer may well be "none of the above." Powerful social forces have the potential to turn each of us into human whirlwinds charging about in fast forward. *Work, time away from work, and everything in between* appear to be part of a never-ending, ever-lengthening list of things to do during days that race by.

To say that Americans work too many hours, and that too much work is at the root of the time pressure we feel and the leisure we lack, is to miss the convergence of larger, more fundamental issues. We could effectively handle the longer hours that we work compared with the Europeans (actually less than 79 minutes daily). It's everything else competing for our attention that leaves us feeling overwhelmed. Once overwhelmed, the

feeling of being overworked quickly follows.

Nearly every aspect of American society has become more complex since the mid-1980s. Traveling is more

cumbersome. Learning new ways to manage and to increase productivity takes its toll. *Merely living* in America today and participating as a functioning member of society guarantees that your day, week, month, year, and life as well as your physical, emotional, and spiritual energy will easily be depleted unless you find the proper vantage point from which to approach each day.

Do you personally know *anyone* who works for a living who consistently has unscheduled, free stretches?

Five factors, or "mega-realities," simultaneously contribute to the perceived and actual erosion of leisure time among Americans:

- Population growth
- An expanding volume of knowledge
- Mass media growth and electronic addiction
- The paper-trail culture
- An overabundance of choices



